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THE

GREAT PEACE-MAKER:

A SUB-MARINE DIALOGUE.

BY

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AUTHOR OF 'ORION,' 'COSMO DE' MEDICI,' 'GREGORY VII.,' 'THE DEATH OF MARLOWE,' 'JUDAS ISCARIOT,' 'PROMETHEUS THE FIREBRINGER,' ETC.

With a Preface

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'OUR LIVING POETS,' ETC.

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PREFACE.

THE 'Sub-Marine Dialogue' now for the first time printed in a separate form appeared anonymously in *Household Words* for the 14th of June, 1851; and was one of a great number of good things contributed to that Journal by Mr. Horne,—whose prose productions were frequently attributed to the late Mr. Charles Dickens.

The Great Peace-Maker has never been included in any volume of poems from the same hand, and has not been publicly claimed by the poet: at the time of its appearance, however, there was no doubt in literary circles as to the authorship; and indeed to those of the present decade who know Mr. Horne's works the authorship is equally obvious. There is probably but one of our living poets who would dream of attempting to treat dramatically

the subject here treated,—certainly but one who would be likely to succeed; and that one is Mr. Horne.

To give a human semblance and a human cry to such and such fictitious or historical men and women, brought to play their parts before us in artistic literature, is no very rare faculty, but one common to the dramatist, the novelist, the writer of monologues or idylls, of romances or ballads; but to give a human cry and a human vivi-semblance to the Ocean's intangible vastness on the one hand, to the Electric Telegraph's essential materiality on the other, is a feat only to be attempted by that impetuous audacity which is a striking characteristic of much of Mr. Horne's work,—as it is of all great work. Audacity coupled with feebleness or any small measure of strength can only result in the ludicrous; but the audacity of genius, coupled as it is with might, leads to sublime issues; and it is precisely the audacity of this little poem of Mr. Horne's, supported by the same strength that carried him through works of a superior magnitude, which renders *The Great Peace-Maker* a thing unique in our literature.

The speeches of the Ocean in this poem have no vagueness, no irrelevance, no inconsistency,—no quality whatever to hint at the artist being not quite at home in the

task of giving a personality to the tremendous Element: the alternate wash and welter and roar and whisper of immeasurable and unfathomable waters blend harmoniously in the reader's imagination with the far-off voice of some God of the Antique World: the voice that we seem to hear is oceanic in its vastness and the impression it conveys of an unrelenting grasp on the destinies of men; and this quality of relentlessness is finely mingled with the other oceanic quality of stately submission to Eternal Law. On the other part, the Telegraph never by any chance becomes commonplace or ultra-material; but merges its business character in a wide philanthropy that has power to half-subdue the sea to its own views of human progress.

Of the moral tone of the poem, its advanced social and political views and its wide intellectuality, there is no need to speak: the qualities are sufficiently obvious, though never protruded to the disadvantage of dramatic effect. Neither is this the place to attempt any general estimate of Mr. Horne's place in our literature, whether as an artist or as a teacher. But a Poet's estimate of another Poet is always valuable and interesting; and I cannot resist transcribing here a passage from a letter of Mr.

Browning's, relating to Mr. Horne's works, and seeming at one point to be particularly applicable to *The Great Peace-Maker*: the passage runs thus:—

'Having long been well acquainted with the principal works of Mr. Horne, I cannot but believe them to be as thoroughly the product of true genius as any of the poetical performances of our time: while of mere talent,—the abundance and versatility remarkable in the many magazine-articles that have come under my notice, may rather hinder than help immediate recognition of the higher quality—though such articles are evidence of another important point in favour of the writer—*every line and word being intended to do good and very fit to effect it.* This opinion of mine,—sincere, whatever be its worth,—you are at liberty to communicate to anybody likely to honor me by caring about it—anybody still ignorant of the power and beauty of Mr. Horne's poetry: to those who are already his readers, it will be superfluous indeed.'

Those who read *The Great Peace-Maker* will at once see how apposite to this poem are the words marked in italics,—how every line, beside being a line of a beautiful poem, is 'intended to do good and very fit to effect it.'

The historical event commemorated in this poem is

the laying of the first successful sub-marine cable,—that, namely, which was laid between Dover and Calais in 1851. The difficulties experienced both before and since that time in carrying out sub-marine telegraphy might well have induced practical people to regard as eutopian the vast dream of telegraphic connection, which the poet gives in the last speech but one of his Telegraph. But the vision is absolutely realised; and its realisation is one of the many instances in which the audacious eutopianism of poets is found to be better justified than the forebodings of those who have to undergo check after check, before mastering practical difficulties. How many people in 1851 regarded as anything but a poetic extravagance the prediction that we should have sub-Atlantic communication with America? And sceptics on that point had much to support them: it was not till fourteen years after the appearance of this poem that the telegraph was completed by the Persian Gulf to India; and it was another year before the Atlantic Cable became a permanent success, after three signal failures.

We can scarcely now realise that the network of wires enveloping Earth and Ocean has come to its present stupendous intricacy in so short a time, and that only twenty

years ago it was daringly prophetic to utter such words as those at page 28, designating the sea as

> 'the means
> Of thought-swift messengers beneath thy waves,
> Till England whispers India in the ear,
> America—north, south—from pole to pole—
> And words of friendship may pass round the world
> Between the dawn and noon.'

This realised vision naturally brings into the mind that memorable vision of the Laureate's, that came so near to being realised in the terrible Franco-Prussian war,—that vision wherein he

> 'Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
> Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales;
> Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rain'd a ghastly dew
> From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue.'

But Mr. Horne's poem leads us rather to hope that, before Man has perfected his applied science adequately for the realisation of the terrible part of this 'dip into the future,' he may have so far perfected his morals and religion as to justify the end of the Laureate's vision;—

> 'Far along the world-wide whisper of the south-wind rushing warm,
> With the standards of the peoples plunging through the thunder-storm;

Till the war-drum throbb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were furl'd
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.
There the common sense of most shall hold a fretful realm in awe,
And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal law.'

Unquestionably such an end,—which the hopeful among us hold as an article of faith,—must be helped forward not only by advances in applied science, but also by all poetry of noble aspiration, such as this 'Sub-Marine Dialogue.'

H. BUXTON FORMAN.

Christmas, 1871.

THE GREAT PEACE-MAKER.

'SLUMBROUS immensity that knows no bounds,
(Since my great depths are hidden from myself),
And hoary age, uncounted by the links
Of man's brief generations,—these are mine,
Alone of earth's prime elements; and thus,
In contemplation of the moving spheres
That shine upon my bosom, I repose,
Murmuring of ancient Gods and Phantoms pale,
Primordial rulers of the elder world—
Majestical Annihilations, now.'

While thus in solemn monologue, the Sea
Brooded on twilight times, there slowly rose
A crest that wore a pallid diadem
Above two cave-like eyes, that, seeming blind,
Shot ever and anon a lightning ray
From out the darkness—piercing the far space—
Then all again in darkness. A Form appeared,
Of length voluminous, like the swarthy train
Of some stupendous serpent, wise and old,
Which rolled its coils with measured energy,
And noiseless as a shadow o'er the grass,
Unto the brink of the impending cliff,
And, with its head outstretched, peered gravely down,
Scanning the wonders of the heaving main.

Again the Sea in cavernous murmurs spake:—

'What freights and hopes my fierce uplifting
storms
Have scattered into spots of drifting foam.
O Memory forbear to chronicle:
For I have borne a large allotted share
In old Destruction's work, and fain would sink
Within myself, no more to make response
To winds, or thunders, or the voice of Death,
But sweep into a silence and a dream,
Listening the hush of mine eternity.'

The Serpent-form that o'er the beetling cliff
Peered down with earnest speculative head,
Lower and lower, now in slow descent

Glode softly, while the volumed train that lay
Athwart the fields above moved, as it seemed,
By fitful glancing lights that urged it on:
Meantime the Sea still held its solemn theme.

'But rest unbroken and immortal calm
Are not for me; my destiny involves
Tempest and shipwreck and the waste of life,
With terror and despair for those at home.
I am the element whom none profane
By social teachings and a useful aim,
Sacred alike from consort with mankind,
And man's domestic vassals, Earth and Fire,
Which do his bidding constantly, and live
Subdued beside him by a master-hand,
Which puts them to all services and ends.'

Now, while the Sea held commune with itself,
Softly the Telegraphic coil unwound,
And, fold by fold, moved gliding down the cliff,
And underneath the waves. The bottom reached,
Onward it swerved with undulating line,
But course determined; and its hollow eyes,
That showed no light nor vision, led the way,
By spirit instinctive, while the train moved on,
Through the dark silence of the abysmal sea.

Again old Ocean spake.

Man ploughs and sows,
And penetrates the bowels of the earth
For mines and treasure; likewise measuring
Her periods and the changes of her rocks,
Above, and deep beneath. I know no change,

Master, or measurer, companion, friend;
Like the sublime old heavens, I dwell alone,
Apart from alteration through all times—
Apart from man's intrusion, who but dares,
In his frail bark, at mercy of the winds,
The thin foam-surface of my empery
To skim. But what is this?—A Shape unknown
Moves through my lowest depths. Say, what art
thou?'

THE TELEGRAPH.

I am the instrument of man's desire
To hold communion with his fellow man,
In distant fields—in other climes afar—
Swifter than flight of migratory bird—
Nay, swift almost as speech from mouth to mouth.

THE SEA.

Man hath his ships, and on my surface holds
Permission to appear; but for my depths,
They have been sacred evermore. Depart!

THE TELEGRAPH.

Slow are his ships, O Sea, when wind and sail
Propel, and e'en the engines that surpass
All sail are tedious when compared with me.
Thou measurest not thy being by its time;
But men are children of a varying span;
Their life is made of years, their years of days,
And every day to them built up of hours,
Which gives them all the hold they have on earth,
To do and suffer.

THE SEA.

'Tis their destiny:
Seek not by science to disturb the law
Which framed humanity, and meted out
Its time and space. Return, and climb the rock.

THE TELEGRAPH.

But science also is man's destiny—
Whereby 'tis granted to his working brain,
His industry, his patience and resolve,
To change his old relations with the law
Of space and time; henceforth dependent made
On man's advance in knowledge, and the power
Of *using* knowledge.

THE SEA.

Till perchance his mind,
Grown mad with its ambition and success,
This strange encroachment on my solemn depths
May seek to raise into some mastery
Over my realm; wherefore, O Serpent-shape,
Turn back, lest I uprend thee, and aloft
Send drifting like a wreck of ropes, till cast
By my indignant waves upon the strand,
To rot amidst the weeds.

THE TELEGRAPH.

Awhile forbear,
Great nurse and cradle of the infant earth!
Nor scorn man's efforts at a natural growth,

Which in some distant age may hope to find
Maturity, if not perfection.

THE SEA.

Speak:

I am no friend to the busy insect man—
Nor yet his foe. His white sail cometh—goeth—
His engines with the long black train of clouds,
Pass and repass. So let them. To my vastness,
The surfaces they traverse are as lines
Of spider-work against the moving sky.
I scarce observe their presence;—therefore speak:
But pause while speaking—for I well observe
That never hast thou ceased to glide along
While holding parley.

THE TELEGRAPH.

Wondrous is my power,
And certain in its action; but, O Sea,
I must lie humbly underneath thy throne,
Accordant with thy laws; therefore, I pray,
Be patient of my progress, and receive
This justifying creed of human hopes.

THE SEA.

My caverns hear thee, but perchance the sands
May be thine only chronicle;—erased
With the next tide.

THE TELEGRAPH.

Let my words be erased
When they have done their work.

THE SEA.

Slumber comes o'er me—
But in my visions shall thy voice be heard.

THE TELEGRAPH.

In ages past, the sovereigns of the earth
Held human lives as dust beneath their feet,
And neighbouring nations born but to be made
Their tributary vassals; distant lands,
Having thy broad arm thrown between, appeared
As barbarous,—worthy conquest, or contempt,
Long devastating wars, or all the scorn
That ignorance could breed. The earth was then
A feasting place and footstool for its kings.
The kings adorned the soldiers and the priests,
The one with golden garb—with fruitful fields

The other; both becoming thus a power
Within a power, and all cementing close
Despotic thrones. The People, body and mind,
Subdued like metal cast in sandy moulds,
Not knowing its own strength, and being weak
By ignorance, and lack of rational will,
So that they starved not, question'd not the right
Of aught, as ordered by these heaven-sent kings,
With their strong armies and their banded priests.
Whereof it came, that nation thought of nation,
Not as a part of the great family
Of human kind, but, mainly, as a horde
Fit to be slaughtered, plundered, hated, scorned—
Belied in daily speech, and history.
Such thoughts and deeds have with those ages passed,

And nation knowing nation by the truth,—
By actual presence, and familiar words,
Spoken or written, henceforth will be slow
To see the red necessity of war,
Save as a brain-disease of knaves and fools,
Nor lend a ready ear to statesmen's tricks,
Hatching an insult or alarm of foes,
Dispersing thus at home men's active thoughts
O'er all their groaning needs and social wrongs.

THE SEA.

The shadows deepen as the sun departs,
And light sinks deeper with his higher rise:
So with man's mind as ignorance enfolds,
Or knowledge waxeth keener and more wide;
Thus wouldst thou say—but what is man to me?

THE TELEGRAPH.

Thy fellow-being here; on thee dependent
For mighty aids—so far inferior;
Yet ranking higher in the eye of God:
The soul hath nobler elements than thine.

THE SEA.

Fear'st thou no tempest?—know'st thou not one swathe
Of my great waters can destroy thee?

THE TELEGRAPH.

Yes:—

But also do I know thy vastness cannot
With petty vengeance, and with watchful spleens
Accord, nor change the habit of its depths.

Destroy me therefore, and again I come—
Again, and yet again—till, rolling over,
Thou slumberest at my presence. Yet, once more,
Hear me, O Sea! nor scorn the denizens
Of thy fair sister Earth, for that indeed
Were but to imitate their own bad deeds
Of early times. Large are their debts to thee;
The chief, thy means of passage to far lands,
From ancient dates; in our own day, the means
Of thought-swift messengers beneath thy waves,
Till England whispers India in the ear,
America—north, south—from pole to pole—
And words of friendship may pass round the world
Between the dawn and noon.

THE SEA.

But despotism—
The bondmen and their masters—how of *these*?

THE TELEGRAPH.

O, well I know that Science will become
The new auxiliary of armies:—kings,
Leagued 'gainst the people, watchfully prepare
All great appliances to guard their thrones,
And keep the spirit of Liberty in check,
Or crush it into 'order;' clear 'tis seen,
That for the people's service and chief good,
The aid of commerce and man's common weal,
I am not sought *by all*, but that as swift
As fly my lightnings, king may call to king,
Asking advice or aid, or giving note

Of danger. Feel I not through my quick nerves,
How Prussia vibrates into Austria's hand,
And both shoot trembling sparks to the grim eye
O' the night-black double eagle of the North,
While the Republican Phantom fluctuates
As either moves my wires, and passes word
O'er lands, 'neath waters, through the forest dark,
Till Freedom, like a fly, is all enmeshed.
The rest is understood. But, O, vain care,
Deep self-deception of short-sighted kings!
For though strong armies at an instant called
By me, may hurry into distant lands—
To Poland—Hungary—Italy—Turkey—France—
Knowledge has been before them—friendship too;
By free and daily intercourse of peace,
The spirit of human brotherhood has found

Its natural sympathy in distant hearts,
And war's old beldame prelude, of a witch
Sent forth to poison minds and fire the blood
With lies and causeless wrath, shall never more
Find credence, nor the nations fail to see
That slaughtering wars for some decayed great
House,
The statesman's idol, or his instrument—
A royal chess-game of the ignorant past—
Are not a people's will, or choice, nor have
A people's sympathy, but rather hate,
And loathing, and revulsion from the wounds
Of memory—the prodigal waste of life,
And grinding taxes lasting for an age—
A mockery to reason. Wherefore, I pray,
O mighty Sea, now that my head hath reached

The opposite shore, that I may lie and work
Beneath thy watery world, and be the means
Of peace on earth, and of good-will to men.

THE SEA.

The ebbing and the flowing of the life
Of man's progressing mind perchance may lead
To some superior state, while I remain
Slumbering beneath the stars. What God permits
I dare not hinder,—therefore keep thy place:
And when I roll my surging prayers to heaven,
They shall remember man, and his good works.

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